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ABSTRACT

One challenge for composition instructors is to determine exactly, or even approximately, what objects and rituals must be observed for students' words to fall with the "true." Another is to successfully communicate these objects and rituals to their students through the various techniques of discipline. The arbitrary nature of delimitation, which makes such identification difficult, coupled with the instructors' own frantic attempts to tow the latest pedagogical line, prompts them to engage in acts of discipline with ultimately conflicting results. Michel Foucault's analyses of discipline and punishment shed some light on classroom structures that render the student powerless. The circular seating arrangement and the writing journal, for instance, may seem like liberating practices but they also reinforce existing power structures between students and teachers. (TB)

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DISCIPLINING THE DEVELOPMENTAL WRITER

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This is why discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions.
— *Michel Foucault*, Discipline and Punish

Introduction

Currently, the California State University Trustees are contemplating what just might constitute the ultimate disciplinary act on developmental writers: to simply remove them from the CSU system. We did not know this when starting our inquiry, but perhaps this now makes our study more timely, as our university, a large (23,000 students) state school in an urban area of Los Angeles County, decides whether to jettison an entire developmental writing program, sending scores of developmental writers to the community college to find their 'remedial' training, asking students to fix their problems before re-entering the institution. It would seem there is a limited audience for the developmental writers' words at the CSU level, but we are hopeful: as the words of the madman began to attract disciplinary attention near the end of the 18th century, so too, perhaps, near the end of the 20th century will the words of the developmental writer. Disciplinary attention brings the needs of the subject into focus; we develop techniques to serve the needs identified, yet those very methods may also stigmatize those we intend to help. Our study, then, focuses on how acts of discipline affect both the individual student and the Academy, how discipline both liberates and constrains, subordinates and elevates, invites and excludes.

Background

Discipline, according to Foucault in Discipline and Punish, "dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude,' a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection." In The Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault examines the primary act of discipline when he considers how the division of Reason/Folly and the subsequent rejection of the words of the madman functioned in the delimitation of discourse; the madman, shunned because his speech was said not to contribute to form part of the common discourse, found that his speech "did

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not strictly exist" (217); it was as if "his words were considered nul and void, without truth or significance, worthless as evidence, inadmissible in the authentification of acts or contracts. . . ." (217). At CSUN, this primary division is accomplished with the administration of the English Placement Test (EPT); this test, in essence, establishes the norm (freshman composition writers) simultaneously with the "other" (students required to enroll in pre-baccalaureate classes) — their words as well do not strictly exist within the academic discourse system. The madman was excluded from his type of discourse, a world discourse, just as our CSUN students are excluded from academic discourse. Our developmental writers, like the madman, speak a truth that fails to fall "within the true."

Goal

One challenge for composition instructors is to determine exactly, or even approximately, what objects and rituals must be observed for students' words to fall within the true — and another is to successfully communicate these objects and rituals to our students through the various techniques of discipline. The arbitrary nature of delimitation which makes such identification difficult, coupled with our own frantic attempts to tow the latest pedagogical line, prompt us to engage in acts of discipline with ultimately conflicting results. Hoping to teach our students not to seize power but to tap into it, to become one of its recipients rather than one of its victims, it is our goal to become more self-conscious about the disciplinary acts that elevate the "other" to speaking subject and to encourage our students to become aware of the many disciplinary acts to which they are subject.

Discussion

Under institutional observation, the developmental writer encounters a myriad of secondary disciplinary acts. Bentham's Panopticon seems to pervade many, if not all, our noted secondary acts; from the seemingly innocuous techniques of journal writing to group work or peer editing, there exists the sense of student as object, instructor as viewer. This is best typified when we place our students in a large circle, forgoing the traditional hierarchical seating arrangement, so that they may interact more easily with their peers; nor is the teacher the 'center' of activity and authority. When asked about classroom arrangement, one student replied, "We can see each other's faces to talk with each other. I like this better than "normal" classrooms because it's more relaxed & less formal." Designed to encourage discussion while positioning them as authorities, the

"Panoptic Circle," allegedly empowering, also renders the student more self-conscious. Not only can the teacher observe behavior, reactions and contributions (or lack thereof), but so can every other student, as one noted, "I get the feeling I'm supposed to speak, even when I don't have anything good to say." The student is subject to a panoply of gazes, from teacher as well as other students, possibly reinforcing the student's perception of herself as object. She internalizes these gazes and "assumes a responsibility for the constraints of power. . . [she] becomes the principle of [her] own subjection," censuring her speech and actions so that her words stay only within the true, never disrupting discourse with her own personal truths. The voices of our more reluctant students, silenced by the Panoptic Circle, may be elicited through journal writing.

Often considered a technique to promote fluency, the journal has become standard in many composition classrooms. While creating a (place) where student writing holds authority, journal writing also (ill)icits a confessional mode of writing from the student, reaffirming the traditional classroom hierarchy as only the student is required to spill forth private thoughts. The teacher then is in the position to "validate" the personal truth of the student through responses that tend to legitimize a given experience, perhaps reinforcing the subject/object relation.

- incitement to confess - journal = diary

Privy to the personal truths found in the journal, the instructor further reinforces his ultimate subjectivity when he functions as the "roving eye," the one who moves freely between the groups he has created. This disciplinary act seems to grant power to the individuals in the group, allowing them to establish themselves as authorities over their own words. Yet students sitting in their individual groups, much like Bentham's inmates sitting in their individual cells, are acutely aware of the institutional gaze, reacting to this gaze and monitoring themselves even when they are not being formally observed. When subject to the direct gaze of the roving eye, students often ignore the words of their peers — other developmental writers — reinscribing themselves as marginalized subjects, thereby reinforcing the primary disciplinary act of classification.

Conclusion

While students can do little to alter their position with the Academy, they can become more aware of how disciplinary acts affect them ;

they don't give credence to their own words - how can we expect them to 'tap into discursive power' when they don't acknowledge their own position A: they seem unwilling to accept such a responsibility B: students recognize they're on the margin, to observe the workings of the system. This vantage point is only gained by an understanding of their position in relation to the academy, //only once they have identifyed acts of discipline can they see their role as resistors to that discipline...this

Questions

- Is it possible, in the panoptic classroom, for students to assume insitutional authority and responsibility for their own learning?
- Is it possible to teach both resistance and compliance in the developmental classroom?
- Is the composition classroom the place to foster a degree of self-consciousness on the part of the student?

*** use journal example- resisting text/self-consciousness to show how we can re-theorize, re-locate the journal in the classroom